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ABSTRACT

Researchers have examined the relationship between the competitiveness of elections and the responsiveness or receptivity of officials put into office by those elections. The author describes his research into the competitiveness of school board elections and the receptivity of those board members. Receptivity is defined as an official's support for communication with, and participation by, his constituents. Data for the research were derived from interviews with 440 board members from 72 elective school boards distributed across the continental United States. Different degrees of metropolitanization are reflected in the sample. The interviews sought attitudes toward participation and communication. The interview results and some explanatory narrative are included. (JF)

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Constitutional engineers and democratic theorists alike have contended that elective systems increase the probability of official receptivity. James Madison wrote in Federalist Paper, Number 52,

> As it is essential to liberty that government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the branch of it under consideration should have an immediate dependence on, and an ultimate sympathy with, the people. Frequent elections are unquestionably the only policy by which this dependence and sympathy can be effectually secured.[1]

More recently, Robert Dahl has expressed a similar opinion: "The election is the critical technique for insuring that governmental leaders will be relatively responsive to non-leaders..."[2] Similarly, "Elected leaders keep the real of imagined preferences of constituents constantly in mind in deciding what policies to adopt or reject".[3]

Though they write specifically about the outcomes of elections, an underlying assumption shared by Madison and Dahl is that the election process is a competitive event. The term "election" is a shorthand for "an open, competitive selection process." To use Lipset's words, an election is "a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office."[4] (Emphasis added) An examination of the roles of elections in influencing the receptivity of officials must include meaningful tests of the assumptions about competitiveness in office seeking: are they fulfilled or not?

The importance of the assumption of competition has been pointed up recently in an article by Kenneth Prewitt.[5] Prewitt reported findings that indicate the assumptions of a competitive election system were not met in the selection process of city council members, even though the councils were ostensibly elective bodies. Specifically, he found that one-fourth of the councilmen got into office by appointment, that only very small numbers of qualified electors voted in the elections, and that councilmen rarely suffered defeat -- voluntary retirement was the rule. He found that most councilmen not only cared little about serving additional terms on the council, but also had little interest in seeking other offices. Thus assumptions about the contest elements of elections -- competition for posts and the importance of threats to the "career" of an office-holder -- are shown to be questionable. The contest elements of elections have been nullified in practice.

Several studies have tried to ascertain what effects a competitive election system has on officials' actions. In a few cases, the behaviors examined were related to receptivity and responsiveness. For example, in a study of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, Duncan MacRae found some evidence that representatives who had experienced close elections were more sensitive to district characteristics than were candidates who had run in non-competitive elections.[6] However, Warren Miller found the reverse relationship to hold in a study of the U.S. House of Representatives.[7] Congressmen from competitive districts were likely to agree with the policy preferences of constituents than were Congressmen from one-party districts. Furthermore, he found that policy decisions (as reflected in roll-call votes) of Congressmen

from one-party districts matched the preferences of their constituents better than did those of their colleagues from competitive districts. These mixed findings on the impact of competition plus Prewitt's statements on the anemic state of competition at the level of local city government provide the groundwork for an inquiry into the selection system for school boards and receptivity.

School board member receptivity is one aspect of responsiveness and has logical primacy. Receptivity is an official's support for communication with and participation by constituents. A receptive board member is one who approves of citizen efforts to express preferences and wishes to see opportunities for such expression enhanced. To respond to constituency preferences, it would seem that an official, unless he is unusually clairvoyant, must necessarily be available for the expression of the preferences. Furthermore, the most appropriate response, the response that is desired or required of the official is often the act of listening or the appearance of paying attention.

An inquiry into school board member receptivity and competitive elections derives its importance from the controversies that surround the school and the traditional place of elections in school governance. We need not dwell upon the importance of the public schools. They are a primary socializing agent of the young: the school constitues an environment with the potential for challenging the religious, moral and political convictions of the family. They perform an important channeling function for society: occupational mobility and the status of the family are dependent in some ways upon

the school. Finally, the schools take an enormous share of public resources: education is the largest budget item in virtually all localities and States.

The belief in the importance of the school to the members of localities is reflected in the organization of school governments. It can be argued that school governments were designed to maximise receptivity and responsiveness. So responsive were they that reform at the turn of the century was in fact an effort to reduce the responsiveness of the school boards to the working class.[8] Election, however, was the primary mode of selection before and after reform.

Eighty-six percent of school boards are elective. All the school boards in thirty-three states are elected by popular vote. Fifteen states have appointive boards. In states with both elective and appointive boards, appointive boards are mostly in the largest cities.[9] It is common for the terms of board members to be staggered so that one or more members are elected every year. The most common length of term is three years. Forty-three percent of elective boards have terms of three or fewer years.

Given the significance of the public schools, the comparatively low level of electoral participation may appear ironic.[10] All accounts indicate that compared to federal and national electoral contests, school related contests are poorly attended. However, it is a mistake to equate voting with participation. The school is a local facility. The availability of the school and the school system means that a great deal of participation can and does take place between elections and around particularistic issues.[11] It is only when the issues become more generally applicable and divisive

that electoral participation rivals that of the other arenas.

Although the periodicity of electoral participation is understandable in the context of school government, it has implications for that government. School board members are elected both at times of low and high electoral interest. When interest is low, board members are often elected without opposition. When there are contests they are often one-sided. It seems likely that these board members are quite different than those who engage in true competitive contests for their seats. This research seeks to test the hypothesis that electoral competition increases the receptivity of school board members.

Methodology

The data for this research are derived from interviews with four hundred and forty board members from seventy-two elective school boards distributed across the continental United States.[12] The interviews were completed in the summer of 1968. Fourteen of the boards are in the Northeast, twenty-two in the Midwest, fifteen in the West and twenty-one in the South.

Different degrees of metropolitanization are reflected in the sample as well. Fifteen of the boards are located in central cities or suburbs of the twelve largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA's). An additional twenty-six boards are located in the central cities of the remaining SMSA's. Thirty-one boards are located outside SMSA central cities, not including the suburbs of the largest SMSA's.

In the course of an extensive interview, board members were asked a series of directed and non-directed questions which elicited information

about their attitudes toward popular participation and communication. The questions and codes are listed in the Appendix. Board members received a single point for each response indicating that they favored greater communication with the public and public participation in board deliberations. The scores of the members ranged from zero to five.

(Table 1 about here)

The distribution of board members on the index of receptivity is shown in Table 1. Fourteen percent of the members fail to score on the index. The bulk of the board members score one and two points. Sixteen percent score three or better. These scores are difficult to interpret by themselves. We must look at how the different scores on the index are systematically related to a number of related activities of the board members.

Three questions in the interview schedule provide an opportunity to test the validity of the receptivity index and to flesh out its meaning. Board members received points on the receptivity index when they expressed support for greater participation by the public in board deliberations and more communication between the board and the public. We would expect as a result that a receptive board member would be more likely than a non-receptive board member to seek support in the community and to be the object of requests for support by members of the community. This is simply to say that we would expect the receptive board member to be more involved in a board-

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF RECEPTIVITY MEASURE

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
N	62	182	122	53	13	4	436
Percent	14	42	28	12	3	1	100

community communications net. Furthermore, it follows that if receptive members are serious about their commitment to greater communication and participation, we could expect them to spend more time with the public.

We asked the board members, "When the school board is about to make a policy decision, do you personally ever try to gain support for the policy from any community groups or organizations?" The question deals with only one way in which a board member may attempt to involve larger numbers of the public in decisions. It is, however, an important stage of the decision process and the answer reflects the openness of the process. It is neither too early, when support could only be general, nor too late, when supporters must accept the accomplished fact.

Only twenty-two percent of the board members acknowledged that they engage in this activity. Support mobilization at this stage of the decision process is apparently not a commonly accepted role. There are, however, clear differences in support mobilization between the lowest and the highest scorers on the receptivity index (Table 2). Receptive board members are more likely to search out support for board policies when the board is about to make a decision.

(Table 2 about here)

We also asked board members, "Do any representatives of community

TABLE 2

MEMBER RECEPTIVITY AND WHETHER OR NOT HE SEEKS SUPPORT

Receptivity[a]	Member Seeks Support			
	No	Yes	Total	N
None	88%	12%	100%	60
Medium	78	22	100	304
High	73	27	100	70
All	78	22	100	434

Gamma = .25[b]

[a] In this table and all that follow the scores on the index of receptivity have been collapsed to facilitate table reading. Scores of one and two have been combined in the category "Medium." This mode of categorizing highlights the difference between the least receptive and the most receptive board members. In some tables the collapsing of codes has eliminated minor reversals.

[b] Gamma is a probabilistic measure of association for ordinal data developed by Goodman and Kruskal. See their "Measures of Association for Cross Classifications," Journal of the American Statistical Association, XLVIX (December, 1954), pp. 747-754. E. Terrence Jones has described the logic of gamma in his book Conducting Political Research (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), pp. 121-123. He writes:

> If two variables are perfectly and positively related, then the chances of randomly drawing a positive pair (pairs ordered in the same direction on the two variables) from among all nontied pairs should be 100 percent; if the two factors have a perfect negative association, then the probability of randomly drawing a negative pair (pairs ordered in the opposite direction on the two variables) from among all nontied pairs should be 100 percent; and if the two variables are totally unrelated, then the probability of randomly selecting a positive pair should be equal to the probability of randomly choosing a negative pair. . .
>
> Gamma can be interpreted as the difference between the probabilities of obtaining positive and negative pairs, ignoring all ties.

groups or organizations ever contact you personally to seek your support for their position?" Fifty-nine percent acknowledged that they had been contacted by groups. Table 3 shows how scores on the index of receptivity are related to the board member's availability to citizens in his district. The more receptive the board member, the more likely he is to claim to have been contacted by a group seeking support. The largest difference is between members who scored and those who did not score on the index.

(Table 3 about here)

Receptive board members are more likely to contact community groups and organizations, and they are more likely to be contacted by them. A good way to summarize this two-way street of contacts is to examine the amount of time the board member spends with the public. Board members were asked a series of questions about how they divide the time they devote to their board duties. One question asked board members how they apportioned their time among five areas: 1) requests or questions from the public; 2) personnel; 3) finances; 4) physical facilities; 5) educational program. Only one of these areas includes contacts with the public. All the other areas necessitate contact with school personnel. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that despite the wording of the question, the category "requests and questions from the public" was interpreted as meaning all contacts with the public.

Table 4 shows the relationship between receptivity and the percent

TABLE 3

MEMBER RECEPTIVITY AND WHETHER OR NOT GROUPS SEEK HIS SUPPORT

Receptivity	Groups Seek Support			
	No	Yes	Total	N
None	62%	38%	100%	60
Medium	38	62	100	304
High	37	63	100	70
All	41	59	100	434

Gamma = .25

of time the board member reports devoting to requests and questions from the public. Increases in receptivity correspond to increases in the time the board member spends with the public.

(Table 4 about here)

It is the receptive board members who are most heavily engaged in the mobilization of the constituency. They have encouraged people and community groups to take part in policy deliberation. And they have been available to the efforts of these groups to obtain support for the groups' positions. Essentially, what the receptive board members have done is to begin to expand representational opportunities.

Electoral Competition and Receptivity

Elective systems are assumed to be competitive and it is competition that is supposed to assure that the official is receptive to the citizenry. We must examine school board politics in elective systems to see if the assumptions of competition are met. We can then go on to see if the presence of contest elements in the selection system does increase the receptivity of board members.

The theory that relates competitive electoral politics to responsive government requires additional elaboration. First, the theory pertains more to the system than to any single candidate's election. Yet certainly the specific election supplies the candidate with his major impressions of the system. Second, the focus of the

TABLE 4

RECEPTIVITY AND TIME WITH PUBLIC

Receptivity	Percent of time with public				
	0-4	5-10	11 or more	Total	N
None	15%	55%	30%	100%	60
Medium	10	56	34	100	296
High	1	56	43	100	70
All	9	56	35	100	426

Gamma = .21

theory is not on the last election, but rather on the uncertainties of the past and present. The candidate asks: how competitive was my last election? How close did I come to losing? Because the election of members is usually staggered, the candidate will also ask how well his colleagues are doing in their reelection bids.

To test the theory, it is necessary to probe beneath the formal mechanisms so as to identify the presence or absence of these contest elements. I begin by examining the relationship between competitive electoral elements and receptivity. Because many board members originally acquired their positions by appointment, I discuss how their receptivity may also be explained by threats implied in their first election. Because the competitiveness of the system may be as important as the member's individual competitive experience and may cause him to alter his assessment of potential competition, this aspect of elective systems is discussed next.

In the course of the interview, members of elective boards were asked a series of questions about their electoral experiences. After ascertaining if they had faced nominal competition, board members were asked whether or not an incumbent had been in contention and whether or not the respondent's ideas were different from those of other candidates. The follow-up questions were designed to probe the depth and meaningfulness of the competition. Competition, I assumed, had more meaning if the competitor was an incumbent[13] and if his ideas were different.

There is support for the assumption that incumbents pose a greater competitive problem than non-incumbents. The high rate of return of incumbents suggests that it is harder to defeat them. The

literature on elective systems suggests that incumbents pose a greater competitive problem than non-incumbents. Prewitt found that "over a ten-year period, four out of five incumbent councilmen who stood for reelection were successful"[14] And David Leuthold in a study of Congress, found that during 1924-56 ninety percent of Congressmen who sought reelection were returned to office.[15]

The advantage of incumbency is suggested by our data as well. A comparison of members who were first appointed and subsequently elected with members who initially ran for positions shows that ten percent fewer of the first group faced any competition at all in their first election. Thus it appears that this group of incumbents had an edge. Unfortunately we don't know how many appointees failed to be elected a first time.

Additional data about the district elections also supports the belief that incumbents are advantaged. Elections are public events, so we sought complete descriptions of the elections preceding the time of the interview. In some cases, these data were obtained from the superintendent's records, in others, the records of the board of elections, and in still others, the local newspapers. Examination of elections immediately prior to the interviews shows that in the sixty-four districts in which incumbents ran for reelection, all incumbents were reelected in two-thirds of the districts. All incumbents were defeated in sixteen percent of the districts.

The third question in the series asked if the respondent's ideas differed from those of some of the other candidates. If, as the member claims, his ideas were no different, the electorate was not offered meaningful alternatives among the candidates. And if the respondent could not see any differences between himself and other

candidates, the competitive nature of the electoral struggle was beclouded and reduced in his eyes. Forty-one percent of the elected respondents saw no difference between their ideas and those of their opponents.

The positive responses to the three questions on competitiveness of the board member's first election were put together into an index. Respondents received one point for each competitive response. The range of possible scores is zero to three. A respondent received a score of zero if he had no competition. If he answered all three questions positively, he received a score of three. Table 5 shows the scoring scheme.

(Table 5 about here)

It is important to point out that the index of competitiveness is based on my own estimate of competitiveness, not the respondent's estimate. The respondent was simply asked for the gross facts of the election; I have interpreted them. Nevertheless, the measure probably suffers from error as a result of the respondent's own attempts to interpret the facts of his election and from the respondent's lapses of memory.

The relationship between the respondent's score on the index of competition and his score on the index of receptivity is presented in Table 6. As the table shows, the proportion of members with zero receptivity drops by ten percentage points, from twenty-one to eleven percent. The proportion of members with a score of "High"

TABLE 5

COMPETITION INDEX SCORING SCHEME

	Percent		Scoring Procedure for Index	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Was there any competition?	18%	82%	0	1
Was any competitor an incumbent?*	34	66	0	1
Did ideas of competitors differ?*	41	59	0	1

*The base for the calculation of the percentages is the 82% of board members who were elected and faced competition in their first election.

receptivity increases by eleven percentage points, from twelve to twenty-three percent, when all three competitive aspects are present in the respondent's first election.

(Table 6 about here)

This relationship appears to be real and not a function of some third variable that is related to both. District conflict and complexity are positively related to both competitiveness and receptivity. Nevertheless, controls for indicators of conflict and complexity do not adversely affect the association. The relationship remains substantially the same when we control for enrollment and metropolitanism. The measure of association is also the same when the member perceives conflict or tension in the district. Ironically, the relationship is stronger for board members in districts where there was no competition for posts in the election prior to the study.

Appointees on Elective Boards

Although a system is elective, it is possible to short-circuit the competitive processes implicit in elections. A member can be appointed to fill a vacancy. As with Prewitt's sample of city councilmen, roughly one-fourth of the board members were first appointed to our elective boards. Nineteen members of the sample have not been elected since their appointments. Our earlier discussion of the advantage of membership might lead us to believe that competition is less significant for appointees than for board

TABLE 6

THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE MEMBER'S FIRST ELECTION AND RECEPTIVITY

Competition		Receptivity				
		None	Medium	High	Total	N
None	0	22%	66%	12%	100%	76
	1	14	75	11	100	64
	2	15	71	14	100	126
High	3	11	68	21	100	148
All		15	70	15	100	414

Gamma = .21

members who are initially elected to their posts.

The theory of competitive elections as a determinant of receptivity may at first blush lead us to expect greater receptivity from members who were elected than from members who were appointed to fill unexpired terms. The elected board members may have faced competition. The appointees surely did not face competition. If we accept this logic, we would be ignoring the fact that it is not the last election but rather the next election that threatens the office holder. Both elected and appointed members must face the next election.

That there is some future election to be reckoned with is what makes appointees to elective boards similar to their elective colleagues and fundamentally different from members of appointive boards. Sooner or later, the appointees face an election. In the election, it is the qualified voters who determine whether the members retain their seats.

Despite what we have already said about the advantages of incumbency, appointees may face a greater threat than their colleagues who were originally elected. Most studies that have claimed that incumbents are advantaged have been studies of previously elected incumbents, not of incumbent appointees. Unlike these appointees, elected incumbents have already put together a winning combination. They have identified a constituency, and they have encouraged its continuing support if they are interested in reelection. By contrast, the appointees were born free. They do not have a popular base. There is no compelling reason to believe they have popular appeal. Thus appointees are subject to the greatest potential threat.

The data show that appointees to elective boards are more receptive than those who were orginally elected. Table 7 shows that the proportion of appointees who score "High" on the index of receptivity is greater than the proportion of originally elected members.

(Table 7 about here)

Why are appointees more receptive than originally elected members? It may be that they feel the threat of an election more acutely than their colleagues who have already been elected once. Alternatively, the appointees may be responding to the same competitive factors in their first election as those faced by other candidates. This alternative is worth examination despite the doubt already cast upon it by this and other studies.

Seventy-four percent of the board members who were appointed and subsequently elected faced competition in their first election. Competition and receptivity are positively related for these appointees although the relationship is weaker than that for originally elected members. The correlation of nominal competition and receptivity for appointees is gamma = .09. The comparable correlation for originally elected board members is gamma = .32. By contrast, differing with one's opponents is much more strongly related to receptivity than is nominal opposition for appointees. Thirty-five percent of those who took positions that differed from those of their opponents scored "High" on the index of receptivity. This compares favorably with the eleven

TABLE 7

INITIAL MEANS OF SELECTION OF ELECTIVE BOARD MEMBER AND RECEPTIVITY

Selection Type	Receptivity				
	None	Medium	High	Total	N
Appointed to elective board	8%	72%	20%	100%	106
Originally elected to elective board	16	69	15	100	330

percent scoring "High" of those who reported no differences.

When we examine the relationship between the competition index and receptivity controlling for initial means of selection the gamma is a meager .14. This association compares unfavorably with a gamma of .24 for initially elected board members. It appears that when the elective process is short circuited by appointment, competition in the first election is not as effective in encouraging receptivity as it is given the initial election of a member.

Implied Threats in the Appointee's First Election

We have seen that competition and receptivity are only slightly related for appointees. Competition cannot explain receptivity of the appointees. Much less can it explain why appointees are more receptive than electees.

I think the answer is that real competition is less the issue than the potential threat of the first election of an appointee. In the first place, the appointee may not be aware that appointed incumbents have an advantage. Second, the averages may not impress him. The election represents the first test of his popular appeal. Furthermore, it represents an evaluation of his performance and an evaluation of those who had enough confidence in his ability to appoint him. With these concerns as the stakes, failure is unacceptable. We can use the nineteen board members who have never faced an election to test our theory about threat. If it be true that appointees who have never faced election face the most threat, the threat to appointees ought to be reduced by their initial electoral victory. Nevertheless, the memories of the initial threat and the strategies developed to meet the threat remain. The threat is obvious and

present for the nineteen who have never faced an election. Table 8 compares the three groups: appointees who have never been elected, appointees who have been elected since their appointment, and members who were initially elected. The most receptive members are the nineteen never-elected appointees.

(Table 8 about here)

I have shown that the more competitive the election of the board member, the more receptive he is. This is true both for members who were originally elected and for those who were originally appointed. I have argued that the first election of an appointee contains an implicit threat that is not comparable to the competitive threat faced by other candidates in their first election. This threat is not measurable by the index of competition.

Competition as a System Attribute

The theory that relates competion and receptivity is more a theory about the electoral system than about the election of a single member. It is not the competition facing the individual that is supposed to keep him responsive but rather his involvement in a competitive system. That an individuals' particular election is more or less competitive is not as important as the collectivity's experiences with and expectations about the system. Of course, the individual is a part of the collectivity. His experiences make up a part of the collective experience and his major impression of

TABLE 8

ELECTORAL EXPERIENCE AND RECEPTIVITY

Election Experience	Receptivity				
	None	Medium	High	Total	N
Appointed to elective board, never elected	5%	63%	32%	100%	19
Appointed, subsequently elected	9	74	17	100	87
Originally elected	16	69	15	100	330
All	14	69	17	100	488

the system is probably derived from his own electoral experiences.

We can examine the systemic relationship of competition by averaging for each board the scores of individuals on the competition and receptivity indexes. In addition we can check this relationship by use of the independently derived measure of incumbent reelection success. Table 9 shows a strong positive relationship between competition and receptivity for the board.

(Table 9 about here)

The second measure of system level competitiveness is the measure of incumbent reelection success in the last election. This measure, as stated earlier, is based on district election figures and is not subject to distortion by board member perceptions or memory. The relationship between incumbent success and board receptivity is shown in Table 10.

(Table 10 about here)

There is a strong positive relationship between the defeat of incumbents in the most recent election and the boards receptivity. The major difference in receptivity is between boards where all incumbents were reelected and those where some were defeated. Competition, it appears, is competition. Where there is some doubt surrounding the reelection propects of incumbents the board is more receptive.

TABLE 9

RECEPTIVITY AND COMPETITION, BOARD LEVEL

Competition		Receptivity			
		Low	High	Total	Number of Boards
None	0	80%	20%	100%	5
	1	64	36	100	11
	2	68	32	100	34
High	3	41	59	100	22
All		60	40	100	72

Gamma = .37

TABLE 10

RECEPTIVITY AND INCUMBENT REELECTION SUCCESS,
BOARD LEVEL

Incumbents	Receptivity			
	Low	High	Total	Number of Boards
All Reelected	72%	28%	100%	43
Some reelected, some defeated	45	55	100	11
All defeated	40	60	100	10
All	62	38	100	64

Gamma = .50

Political Ambition and Receptivity

Political ambition is an element of competition. When a person runs for office, we assume it is something he wants. This is not necessarily so, however. A candidate may run out of a feeling of duty or to satisfy some other need which does not require winning the election.

The theory of electoral responsibility assumes the official to be politically ambitious. At the very least, it assumes that the electorate will have an opportunity after an election to avenge itself on an irresponsible official. The vengeance is achieved through the defeat of the candidate in a reelection drive. However, for defeat to be a truly meaningful act, it has to deny the official something he wants.

If an official does not care whether or not he is reelected in the future, the public lacks the power to deny. As Joseph Schlesinger has written, "representative government, above all depends on a supply of men so driven; the desire for election, and, more important, for reelection, becomes the electorate's restraint upon its public officials...No more irresponsible government is imaginable than one of high-minded men unconcerned for their political futures."[16]

Respondents were asked two questions about their public ambition. The first question asked if the board member wished to return to office after his current term expired. Thirty-two percent of the elective board members responded affirmatively. Another thirty-seven percent said they might, but that they were not sure.

Are these proportions high or low? The answer lies with the standard or baseline that one chooses to use. If data were available for other collegial or legislative bodies, the rates for board members might compare

favorably. In thinking about the significance of these figures, it should be noted that tenure and the desire to seek another term are not unrelated. Newer board members are much more likely to be interested in another term than are their senior colleagues.

Board members were also asked if there were any other governmental positions that they would like to hold. Eleven percent said yes and seven percent said maybe. Eighty-two percent of the board members denied having any ambition for another office. These answers indicate that few board members see the board as a stepping stone to other governmental offices.

Again the significance of these figures is related to the baseline one uses. From the perspective of political recruitment, the school board does not look like a fertile source of candidates for higher office. On the other hand, from the perspective of professional educators who want to keep schools and politics separate, eighteen percent of board members flirting with higher office may be an intolerably high figure.[17]

There is no relationship between the desire to serve again and receptivity. Here ambition fails as a means of keeping board members responsive. There is, however, a weak positive relationship between the desire to hold other governmental positions and receptivity (Table 11). Sixteen percent of the unambitious board members showed no receptivity, whereas seven percent of those with some ambition scored zero.

(Table 11 about here)

The relationship between ambition and receptivity is theoretically related to the cycle of incumbency. Though a board member may be ambitious for another post, it is unlikely that his ambitions will greatly affect his

TABLE 11

POLITICAL AMBITION AND RECEPTIVITY

Ambition	Receptivity				
	None	Medium	High	Total	N
No	16%	69%	15%	100%	355
Yes or Maybe	7	74	19	100	80
All	14	70	16	100	435

Gamma = .22

behavior on the board until he has some hopes of fulfilling those ambitions. Such a moment is most likely to occur after he has proven himself on the board and after he has been successfully reelected a first time. After this point, there would likely be a decline in any relationship between ambition and receptive behavior. Either the board member is content to remain on the board or he wishes to give up office holding all together. The data show that what ambition there is among board members is fairly much concentrated among members with less than five years of experience on the board.

If we knew how many times each board member had been elected, we could see if those who have been elected twice, and are therefore in the most opportune position to fulfill their aspirations, show a stronger relationship between their ambition and receptivity. Not having this information, a bit of surmise may serve. The huge majority of board members are elected for three or four year terms. Since one fourth of the members have been appointed, their second election - their reelection - would average a bit later than that of their initially elected colleagues. Thus we would expect opportunity to peak at four and five years of service. Table 12 shows the measures of association between ambition and receptivity for five ranges of years of service. The strongest association is found among members with four to five years of service.

(Table 12 about here)

TABLE 12

POLITICAL AMBITION AND RECEPTIVITY CONTROLLING FOR TENURE

Years of Service	Gamma	Table N
1 or fewer years	-.05	70
2-3 years	.24	109
4-5 years	.51	72
6-7 years	.15	50
8 or more years	-.02	133

The board member's evaluation of his prospect for public support may also affect the relationship between his ambition and his receptivity. An ambitious board member ought to be more receptive if he feels his electoral opportunities are threatened. The mechanism most available for estimating these opportunities is the electoral bids of his colleagues. When his colleagues face opposition or meet defeat in their reelection. attempts, a board member must, except in unusual circumstance, feel that this is in part a negative judgement of the whole board.

A study by John Walden supports the proposition that an incumbent's defeat presages a threat to the positions of other incumbents.[18] In a study of 117 California districts, he found that incumbent defeats were accompanied by reports of political instability and major controversies in the community. The defeats appeared to be a reflection of a power struggle between incumbents and emergent dissidents. Finally, he found that superintendent turnover was greater where incumbents were defeated than where they were reelected.

We can examine the impact of threat on the relationship of ambition and receptivity by introducing some controls. The first control is the presence of a contest for board positions in the most recent election. A contest cannot be interpreted as an indictment of the board but it is an indicator of political instability. The second control is the re-election success of incumbents. The defeat of incumbents is under most circumstances an indicator of dissatisfaction with the board. The gamma measures of association when the controls are imposed are shown in column A of Table 13. The measures of the relationship in column B are for board members who have served for two or more years. This additional control

TABLE 13

POLITICAL AMBITION AND RECEPTIVITY CONTROLLING FOR THREAT

	A All Members		B Members for Two or More Years	
	Gamma	Table N	Gamma	Table N
Contest for board position in most recent election	.22	318	.30	260
Some or all incumbents defeated in most recent election	.33	121	.45	96

eliminates those board members who are not yet in a position to exploit their membership. Furthermore, it eliminates members who may have been elected recently in opposition to the board majority.

Conclusion

Americans have placed their faith in elective systems. We elect people to the lowest offices as well as the highest. We elect people to serve in tier after tier of government. And we go to the polls sometimes several times a year to make these selections.

The prominence of the elective mode of selection of officials is a result of the belief that through election the people gain better representation. Surely if we wanted the best man in terms of expertise we would employ another choice process. What we want in a representative is someone whom we can believe cares about what we want. Perhaps we cannot always have what we want, but our wants remain a paramount factor in the decision calculus.

Elections are designed to make the candidate care about what we want. In return for the promise of our vote, we get a hearing or the opportunity for a hearing. Anything that reduces the candidate's dependence on our vote diminishes our opportunities. A walk-away election and the promise of similar elections in the future is one factor that reduces the candidate's dependence. Not caring about the outcome of some future election is a second factor that reduces the candidate's dependence.

In this paper, we have seen that electoral competition is related to board member receptivity. It does not explain a great deal of the variance, but it is one factor. Higher correlations would probably emerge

if I had better indicators of felt threat of electoral defeat. The competition index based on the c lidate's first election and the incumbency variables are merely pale shadows of such threats. Although electoral competition is related to environmental complexity and community conflict, the relationship between competition and receptivity persists when these factors are controlled.

Surprisingly, I think, we found that appointed members of elective boards are more receptive than their colleagues who were originally elected. Some of the receptivity of appointed members is explainable by competition. Although we view incumbency as an advantage, this does not necessarily reduce the threat implicit in the first election of an appointee. The fact that he has not run before may actually increase the magnitude of the threat in his own eyes. He must run on his record without ever having proved his popular appeal or constituency support. To build popular support and to reduce his own anxiety, it is likely that the appointee will be receptive. Appointees who have never faced an election are, by this reasoning, the most anxious. They are also the most receptive of the members on elective boards.

Ambition, too, plays a role in receptivity. We found that board members who aspire to other governmental positions are more receptive than those who do not. The best relationship was found among those whose ambitions were probably at flood and those whose ambitions were most threatened by electoral events.

Competition and candidate ambition are variables that are manipulable. Concerned citizens can arrange that no one gets elected to the board without a struggle. They can further see to it that the member will face a contest

for reelection. Finally, concerned citizens can eschew those who are compelled to run by civic duty and embrace the ambitious. This is not an exact formula for receptivity, but it is a beginning.

APPENDIX

Questions and Codes for Receptivity Index

1. What have been your most satisfying experiences as a school board member?

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a) The support (not specifically financial) that the community gives to education. Public participation or interest.

b) Communications, relationships, associations with the public, improvements in or maintenance of such relationships.

2. And what experiences have been most dissatisfying?

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a) Low level of public participation, apathy of public; lack of support (excluding financial) for education.

3. In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing education in this school district?

---

a) Maintain (good) public relations.

b) Stimulating public interest in the schools; increasing understanding of schools and problems.

c) Local or neighborhood control; developing mechanisms and opportunities for direct involvement of the community in education, e.g., decentralization of big city school systems, devolution of authority to parent councils and/or local school personnel.

d) Getting more information about public attitudes toward schools.

e) Board is closed to the public, unrepresentative, or bureaucratic.

f) Other public relations or community control issues.

4. How do you expect to handle this (a previously stated) problem?

---

a) By increasing interest, awareness, sympathy, or help on the part of the community or general public.

b) By making the board more open to the public.

5. There are two main points of view how a school board member should act when he has to make up his mind. One is that he should do what the public wants him to do, even if it isn't his own preference. The second is that he should use his own judgment, regardless of what others want him to do. Which of these views comes closest to your own view? [After respondent answers] Why do you feel this way?

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a) A board member should seek the views of the people, and then use his own judgment.

b) A board member should consider the views of the people, then make up his own mind.

c) The public should have a say, but should not be <u>the</u> determining factor.

d) Board members are elected to do what the people want; they represent the majority.

e) What the public wants is usually best; a board member should go along with the public.

6. How do you feel about the efforts of groups to make their views known to you? (IF NECESSARY) Why do you feel that way?

---

a) General approval with no elaboration, e.g., welcome it, appreciate it, approve, good, fine.

b) General approval, with emphasis that they should do this, that it is important for them to do it.

c) Provide information; tells R what people are thinking; enables R to gauge public understanding and opinion.

d) Since the public pays the bill, taxes, etc., they have a right to be heard and to know how their money is being spent.

e) People have a right to do that; it's the democratic way; it's the board member's job to listen.

f) It's a demonstration of interest and (sometimes implied) is good.

g) Communication is desirable--either one-way or two-way; it is useful to have communication, exchange.

*I would like to thank Mr. Kent Jennings for his comments on earlier drafts of this work, I would also like to thank both Jennings and Harmon Zeigler for making the data discussed herein available to me.

The data used in this research are derived from a national study of school board members and superintendents. The study was conducted by the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration (University of Oregon) with a grant from the U.S. Office of Education. The Survey Research Center (University of Michigan) conducted the interviewing and processed the data. Jennings and Zeigler were the project directors. I was the assistant study director.

FOOTNOTES

1. James Madison, "Federalist Paper #10," The Federalist Papers, Introduction by Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 321.

2. Robert Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory (Phoenix Edition Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 25.

3. Robert Dahl, Who Governs? (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 164.

4. Seymour M. Lipset, Political Man (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), p. 12.

5. Kenneth Prewitt, "Political Ambitions, Volunteerism, and Electoral Accountability," American Political Science Review, LXIV (March, 1970), pp. 5-17.

6. Duncan MacRae, "The Relation between Roll Call Votes and Constituencies in the Massachusetts House of Representatives," Political Behavior, ed. H. Eulau (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1956), pp. 317-323.

7. Warren Miller, "Majority Rule and the Representative System," Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems, ed. E. Allardt and T. Littunen. Transactions of the Westermarch Society, 10. (Helsinki: The Academic Bookstore, 1964).

8. Leigh Stelzer, "The Reform of School Boards in the Late Nineteenth Century," Unpublished manuscript.

9. Morton M. Hall, Provisions Governing Membership on Local Boards of Education #13, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office), 1957; Alpheus White, Local School Boards: Organization and Practices (Washington, D. C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), 1962.

10. David Minar, "The Community Basis of Conflict in School System Politics," American Sociological Review (December, 1966), pp. 822-835.

11. M. Kent Jennings, "Parental Grievancies and School Politics," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXXII (Fall, 1968) pp. 363-378.

12. The seventy-two boards form the elective subsample of an original sample of eighty-two elective and appointive school boards. Ninety-three percent of all members of the elective boards were successfully interviewed.

    Of the seventy-two boards in the sample, all the members of forty-eight boards were interviewed. All but one of the members of an additional seventeen boards were interviewed. This left only seven boards for which more than one member was not interviewed. All the superintendents of the seventy-two boards were interviewed.

Boards were chosen for inclusion in the original sample on the basis of a prior national study of the political socialization of high school seniors. See M. Kent Jennings and Lawrence Fox "The Conduct of Socio-Political Research in Schools: Strategies and Problems of Access," School Review, LXXVI (December, 1968), pp. 428-444. The boards in the sample are the elective boards with jurisdiction over the public schools in the prior study. It should be stressed that this is not a representative sample of school board members. School boards in the total sample represent school boards in rather direct proportion to the number of secondary students in the school system. A straight probability sample of school boards would have yielded a prepondurance of boards representing small school districts. By eliminating appointive boards, we are reducing the representation of school districts in large cities and in the South.

13. Some questions about the use of the incumbency question as an indicator of competition require mention. Competition may mean two or more candidates running for one seat or it may mean four candidates running for three seats. Running against an incumbent under the latter condition may mean that one out of four candidates vying for the three seats was an incumbent. In this situation, the potential board member was formally competing with the incumbent, but in actuality, he may not have seen himself as contending with the incumbent. Finally, because of the way this question was asked in the survey--asked of appointees who had faced election as well as of "elected only" members --the respondent may have been the incumbent. However, this is unlikely.

14. Prewitt, p. 9.

15. David Leuthold, Electioneering in a Democracy (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), p. 127.

16. Joseph Schlesinger, Ambition and Politics (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), p. 2.

17. Neil Gross, Who Runs Our Schools? (N.Y.: John Wiley and Sons, 1958), p. The Massachusetts school superintendents studied by Gross estimated that twenty-one percent of the board members sought election to the school board because they were interested in getting political experience.

18. John C. Walden, "School Board Changes and Superintendent Turnover," Administrator's Notebook, XV (January, 1957), pp. 1-4.